

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 172 192

CS 204 729

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TITLE Symbolic Interactionism and Ethnomethodology: A
Perspective on Qualitative Research.
PUB DATE Aug 77
NOTE 33p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the
Association for Education in Journalism (60th,
Madison, Wisconsin, August 21-24, 1977)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Ethnography; *Ethnology; *Interpersonal Relationship;
*Research Methodology; *Social Behavior; Social
Relations; *Social Science Research
IDENTIFIERS Ethnomethodology; *Symbolic Interactionism

ABSTRACT

Methods employed in social science research must be true to the phenomena under investigation. Both symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology take everyday life as their fundamental premise. Symbolic interactionism, based primarily on the work of George Herbert Mead, is the peculiar and distinctive character of interaction as it takes place between human beings interpreting and defining each other's actions instead of merely reacting to them; their response is based on the meanings which they attach to such actions and is mediated by the use of symbols and interpretation. According to Mead, meaning is ascribed to the actions of others by taking the role of others, either of a specific person (significant other) or of a group (generalized other). Ethnomethodology is the examination of how people in their everyday lives make sense of the situations in which they find themselves. Both methodologies require that phenomena must determine the method, although the selection of phenomena as relevant reflects the researcher's choice. A methodological implication of these approaches is that problems must be examined within the situations in which they manifest themselves by getting close to the people being studied.
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Symbolic Interactionism and Ethnomethodology:
A Perspective on Qualitative Research

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The past decade has witnessed a reemergence of interest in qualitative research methods in the social sciences. Two such approaches to qualitative research are symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology. The purpose of this paper is twofold: First, to present what we consider to be the important underlying concepts behind both approaches; and secondly, to argue that it is not all that easy to make a clear-cut distinction between quantitative and qualitative research methods.¹ Many researchers who argue for and use qualitative research methods are unaware of the impact these methods have on the problems they are studying. The paper ends by suggesting that within the qualitative framework, a finer distinction needs to be made about the methods employed.

Two major theoretical perspectives have dominated the social sciences.² One, positivism, traces its roots to the work of Auguste Comte and Emile Durkheim. The positivist seeks the facts or causes of social phenomena; the subjective states of individuals are of little concern to them. The second major theoretic perspective, which may be labeled phenomenological, has its roots in the work of Max Weber (Bogdan and Taylor: 2). This approach attempts to understand human behavior from the point of view of the actors involved.

Although a critique of the positivistic approach is well beyond the scope of this paper (Gouldner, Douglas, 1970c; Mehan and Wood, Krain), an understanding of the phenomenological perspective and its inherent methodological principles is not really possible without an understanding of some of the major problems in the positivistic approach. What follows, then, is a brief critique of the positivistic approach. Following Douglas' lead, we shall use the term absolutist sociology to refer to the positivistic approach. Absolutist sociology refers to those perspectives which view man as an object which is causally and totally determined by forces outside his self. Thus, under the rubric of absolutist

sociology we can list functionalism, structuralism, and experimentalism based on the hypothetico-deductive method.

The absolutist sociologist has based his models on those developed in the natural sciences. These models, imported from the natural sciences³ which in turn have their source in classical scientific method, search for invariant relationships among variables by an "objective" method. Absolutist sociologists have tended to examine states of relationships rather than the process by which these states came about, Blumer writes:

There can be no doubt that, when current variable analysis deals with matters or areas of human group life which involve the process of interpretation, it is markedly disposed to ignore the process. The conventional procedure is to identify something which is presumed to operate on group life and treat it as an independent variable, and then to select some form of group activity as the dependent variable. The independent variable is put at the beginning part of the process of interpretation and the dependent variable at the terminal part of the process. The intervening process is ignored or, what amounts to the same thing, taken for granted as something that need not be considered.... Where process is recognized, its study is regarded as a problem that is independent of the relation between the variables (Blumer, 1972b: 97-98).

A second major problem with this tradition is the tendency to work with variables which may conceal or misrepresent the character of social life. "The deficiency stems from the logical need of variable analysis to work with discrete, clear-cut and unitary variables" (Blumer, 1972b: 99). The complexities of interaction within human group life are likely to be masked and obfuscated by these variables. The irony is that the attractiveness of variable analysis--discrete, clear-cut, and unitary variables with their ease of manipulation--leads to a glossing over of what is really going on in human group life. A second irony is that the classical model of the natural sciences upon which variable analysis is built has been destroyed "by the revolutions wrought in relativity and quantum mechanics" (Douglas, 1970c: viii).

Objectivity, central to absolutist sociology, has also recently been subjected to severe criticisms (Garfinkel, 1967; Douglas, 1970c; Cicourel, 1964;

Mehan and Wood). Gouldner argues that social scientists have claimed to have removed their disciplines from ideology; this has allowed the social scientist to defocalize himself. Gouldner writes: "positivism itself was grounded in a specific ideology and politics: the politics of 'what is.' It is the tacit affirmation that 'what is,' the status quo, is basically sound; that it only needs to be fine tuned through the use of the new social science and by a 'positive' appreciation of 'what is,' scientifically formulated by the new sociological priesthood" (Gouldner: 37-38). By the defocalization of the scientist himself, Gouldner means that the method insulates the research and its findings from the biases of the researcher. Gouldner argues that in any science, natural or social, the scientist cannot be removed from that which he is studying. Thus, any claims to objectivity in the traditional social science sense are without merit. Objectivity is, at best, relative (Gouldner: 45-50).

This objectivity is further premised by the assumed independence of the variables the absolutist sociologist works with from the concrete situations of everyday life. Variables such as crime rates, divorce rates, and suicide rates are thought of as being independent from everyday life and are thought to be barometers of the functioning of society. In reality, these seemingly independent variables are a product of unknown officials who compile these figures in the everyday world (Garfinkel, 1967). Even omnipresent "questionnaire surveys assume a competent use of the language, a vastly complex common-sense understanding of how to ask questions, how to detect lying, how to interpret, and so on" (Douglas, 1970c: 8). In fact, the theories and hypotheses the absolutist sociologist works with are derived, in the final analysis, from everyday life; yet, these sociologists have ignored the world of common-sense everyday life as an area of inquiry.

Garfinkel writes:

Despite the topic's centrality, an immense literature contains little data and few methods with which the essential features of socially recognized "familiar scenes" may be detected and related to dimensions of social organization. Although sociologists take socially structured scenes of everyday life as a point of departure they rarely see, as a task of sociological inquiry in its own right, the general question of how any such common sense world is possible. Instead, the possibility of the everyday world is either settled by theoretical representation or merely assumed. As a topic and methodological ground for sociological inquiries, the definitions of the common sense world of everyday life, though it is appropriately a project of sociological inquiry, has been neglected (Garfinkel, 1967: 36).

To understand everyday life simply means how individuals in their own worlds know "the natural facts of life." These "natural facts of life" serve as resources through which individuals carry on their lives in society, both as discrete and as interacting individuals. Garfinkel argues that the "'natural facts of life,' are massive facts of the members' daily existence both as a real world and as the product of activities in a real world. They furnish the 'fix,' the 'this is it' to which the waking state returns one, and are points of departure and return for every modification of the world of daily life that is achieved in play, dreaming, trance, theater, scientific theorizing, or high ceremony" (Garfinkel, 1967: 35).

To come to an understanding of everyday life, the methods one employs must be true to the phenomena under investigation. The phenomena investigated must be that which is experienced in everyday life, not the phenomena created by the absolutist sociologist. Both symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology take as their fundamental premise everyday life. Thus, an understanding of how symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology perceive what everyday life is is essential to understanding how they go about examining everyday life. To separate theory from practice or method would make any discussion of these qualitative methods highly problematic. The next two sections of this paper

briefly discuss what we consider to be the key concepts of both symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology as they pertain to everyday life. At this point it is important to raise two caveats: one, that an understanding of the methodological perspectives of both symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology is completely contingent upon their theoretical perspectives; and, second, since there are many shades of symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology, what is presented here will not be universally shared by the differing proponents of the two approaches.

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism stems from the work of John Dewey, Charles Horton Cooley, James Mark Baldwin, William I. Thomas, Florian Znaniecki, and, most notably, George Herbert Mead. Recent proponents of symbolic interactionism are Herbert Blumer, Manford H. Kuhn, Arnold Rose, Howard S. Becker, and Norman Denzin.

Blumer defines symbolic interactionism as "the peculiar and distinctive character of interaction as it takes place between human beings. The peculiarity consists in the fact that human beings interpret or 'define' each other's actions instead of merely reacting to each other's actions. Their 'response' is not made directly to the actions of one another but instead is based on the meaning which they attach to such actions. Thus, human interaction is mediated by the use of symbols, by interpretation, or by ascertaining the meaning of one another's actions. This mediation is equivalent to inserting a process of interpretation between stimulus and response in the case of human behavior" (Blumer, 1972a: 145). The key feature of symbolic interaction is the formation of action by the individual within a social setting. The individual formulates his actions according to how he perceives the actions or intended actions of others in that

social setting. Mead argues that the individual does this by taking the place of those he is interacting with.

The work of George Herbert Mead is the foundation upon which symbolic interactionism is built. Unfortunately, Mead never systematically presented his ideas. His major works are a compilation of fragmentary pieces of his writing and lectures put together by his students. As such, they are highly repetitive and sketchy. Thus, it is at times more fruitful to examine the notions of those who have systematically studied and presented Mead's ideas rather than going to the primary works themselves. What follows, then, is a discussion of some of Mead's key concepts taken from both his own work and from the interpretations given by some of his students.

Unlike lower animals, the human being does not act simply by responding to the activities of others. In addition, human beings have the ability to respond to the intentions of others. That is, man acts not only toward the overt behavior of others, but also toward their expected future behavior. Animals respond directly and automatically to stimuli. Human beings, on the other hand, respond to the intentions of others by ascribing meaning to the symbolic gestures of others.

Meltzer explains this process:

Gestures, at the non-human or non-linguistic level do not carry the connotation of conscious meaning or intent, but serve merely as cues for the appropriate response of others. Gestural communication takes place immediately, without any interruption of the act, without the mediation of a definition or meaning. Each organism adjusts instinctively to the other, it does not stop and figure out which response it will give. Its behavior is, largely, a series of direct automatic responses to stimuli. Human beings, on the other hand, respond to one another on the basis of the intentions or meanings of gestures. This renders the gesture symbolic, i.e., the gesture becomes a symbol to be interpreted; it becomes something which, in the imaginations of the participants, stands for the entire act (Meltzer: 7).

For example, while saying good-night to his date, the man moves his head toward hers. The woman interprets this symbolic gesture as meaning "he is going to

kiss me." The woman responds to the gesture by imaginatively projecting herself into the future and perceiving what that gesture stands for. Not only does a human being respond to the gestures of others, but he can also respond to his own gestures.

According to Mead, the ability to ascribe meaning to the actions of others is accomplished by taking the role of others--"either the role of a specific person [Mead's 'significant other'] or the role of a group (Mead's 'generalized other'). In taking such roles the individual seeks to ascertain the intention or direction of the acts of others. He forms and aligns his own actions on the basis of such interpretation of the acts of others. This is the fundamental way in which group action takes place in human society" (Blumer, 1972a: 150). The ability of a human being to take the role of others allows him to see himself as a social object. This ability of a human being to see himself as a social object enables him to respond to his own gestures in the same way in which he responds to the gestures of others.

"To state that the human being can respond to his own gestures necessarily implies that he possesses a self" (Meltzer: 8). To use Cooley's oft-quoted phrase, self and society are twin-born. This means that the self is formed and developed through interactions with one's primary groups. "The development of the self is concurrent with the development of the ability to take roles. The crucial importance of language in this process must be underscored. It is through language (significant symbols) that the child acquires the meanings and definitions of those around him. By learning the symbols of his groups, he comes to internalize their definitions of events or things including their definitions of his own conduct" (Meltzer: 9).

According to Mead, the self is composed of two aspects: the "I" and the "Me." The "Me" is the internalized other. It represents the attitudes and

meanings held in common by one's primary groups. "The 'I' is the impulsive tendency of the individual. It is the initial, spontaneous, unorganized aspect of human experience. Thus, it represents the undirected tendencies of the individual" (Meltzer: 10). The act is initiated by the "I" and is controlled and directed by the "Me." The self must always be seen as composed of an "I" and a "Me." There is an ongoing dialectical tension between the "I" and the "Me." Meltzer writes that "every act begins in the form of an 'I' and usually ends in the form of the 'Me.'" For the 'I' represents the initiation of the act prior to its coming under control of the definitions or expectations of others (the 'Me'). The 'I' thus gives propulsion while the 'Me' gives direction to the act. Human behavior, then, can be viewed as a perpetual series of initiations of acts by the 'I' and of acting-back-upon the act (that is, guidance of the act) by the 'Me.' The act is a resultant of this interplay" (Meltzer: 10).

Clearly, the development of the self is conditional upon interaction: for Mead, both the "I" and the "Me" do not exist without interaction. From birth, the human being is in constant interaction with those around him. As the individual matures, he becomes socialized to the general culture as well as to the various sub-groups of which he is a part. It is precisely this ability to learn the general culture that allows the individual to change primary group affiliations. Thus, socialization is an ongoing and continuous process. Communication is central to this socialization process for it is by means of symbols that both the general culture and the sub-cultures of various primary groups are learned. It is important to note that both the general culture and the myriad sub-cultures have a history. That is, the general culture and the various sub-cultures exist prior to the individual. But, at the same time, the general cultures and the various sub-cultures are in a constant state of flux due to new members who, in turn, are socialized by the culture and also socialize other members thereby changing the

culture. Blumer writes:

Human groups are seen as consisting of human beings who are engaging in action. The action consists of the multitudinous activities that the individuals perform in their life as they encounter one another and as they deal with the succession of situations confronting them. The individuals may act singly, they may act collectively, and they may act on behalf of, or as representatives of, some organization or group of others. The activities belong to the acting individuals and are carried on by them always with regard to the situations in which they have to act. The import of this simple and essentially redundant characterization is that fundamentally human groups or society exist in action and must be seen in terms of action....The life of any human society consists necessarily of an ongoing process of fitting together the activities of its members. It is this complex of ongoing activity that establishes and portrays structure or organization. A cardinal principle of symbolic interactionism is that any empirically oriented scheme of human society, however derived, must respect the fact that in the first and last instances human society consists of people engaging in action (Blumer, 1969: 6-7).

It is within human group interaction that meanings arise, i.e., meanings are not intrinsic to objects themselves. ⁴ Meanings are ascribed to objects by individuals in interaction in relation to the situations in which this interaction transpires. This, of course, indicates that any social act requires at least two individuals. "Since such acts occur over time, they have a history. This makes possible the appearance of gestures, defined as any part of the act which stands for or comes to be a sign of, those parts of the act yet to occur" (Stryker: 438). Individuals may respond to initial gestures as indicators of later stages of the act. "Vocal sounds can serve as gestures, and they too may have meaning. The meaning of a gesture (an early stage of an act) is the behavior which follows it (the later stages of the act): meaning is, by definition, behavior" (Stryker: 438). A symbol may be said to be significant when it essentially means the same thing for the producer of that symbol as it does for the one who perceives it. Thus, language is a system of significant symbols. This simply means that language is itself a system of shared meanings, and, it therefore follows that, without shared meaning there can be no communication.

As Mead puts it: "There is, then, a great range in our use of language; but whatever phase of this range is used is a part of a social process, and it is always that part by means of which we affect ourselves as we affect others and mediate the social situation through this understanding of what we are saying. That is fundamental for any language; if it is going to be language one has to understand what he is saying, has to affect himself as he affects others" (Mead: 75).

To summarize, it should be clear from the preceding discussion of Mead's work as well as the works of others that social interaction is the focal point in not only the formation of the self but also the larger society embodied in human group life. From the foregoing discussion of Mead, three basic premises of symbolic interaction may be identified. The first premise is that man is born into a meaningful world. The second premise is that these meanings are derived from social interaction. Interaction is contingent upon role-taking. The third premise is that meanings are changed, modified, and transformed according to the social situation in which individuals interact.

The methodological implications of these premises are profound. Of paramount importance is that the researcher remain true to the situation he is studying. The researcher must examine his problem in the situation in which it manifests itself. Thus, questionnaires and interviews, if used alone, take the problem outside of the situation and thereby create an artificial problem. The researcher must get close to the people he is studying, "not only to watch but also to listen to the symbolic sounds that characterize this world. A dialogue with persons in their natural situation will reveal the nuances of meaning from which their perspectives and definitions are continually forged" (Schatzman and Strauss; 6).⁵ Most symbolic interactionist studies have been participant observation and life histories. It has been argued that these procedures allow

the researcher to better understand how changes in the social situation affect individuals. Symbolic interactionism will be more critically examined in the final section of this paper.

Ethnomethodology

The term ethnomethodology was coined by Harold Garfinkel. Major practitioners of ethnomethodology besides Garfinkel are: Aaron W. Cicourel, Jack D. Douglas, Harvey Sacks, Emmanuel A. Schegloff, David Sudnow, D. Lawrence Wieder, Don H. Zimmerman, Roy Turner, and Egon Bittner. Ethnomethodology, as Garfinkel notes, is heavily indebted to the work of Alfred Schutz.

At its basic level, ethnomethodology is not a method but refers instead to the examination of how people in their everyday lives make sense of the situations they find themselves in. The ethnomethodologist argues that the meanings of situations are ambiguous to those involved. How people go about making sense of these situations is what the ethnomethodologist studies. (Bogdan and Taylor: 16)

Ethnomethodology is referred to by Garfinkel as "the investigation of the rational properties of indexical expressions and other practical actions as contingent ongoing accomplishments of organized artful practices of everyday life" (Garfinkel, 1967: 11). The present effort is an attempt to explicate this definition.

By indexical expressions--a term coined by Charles Sanders Peirce--Garfinkel means that meanings are determined by the contextual elements of time, place, situation, and "the knowledge that is taken for granted about the persons involved" (Douglas, 1970c: 38). Bar-Hillel discusses indexicality in this context :

One major problem lies in the fact that the pragmatic context, as it is known to the producer of the expression and which is, nota bene, not formulated but assumed to be tacitly understood in any act of communication, need not be understood in this way by a recipient and

may be understood in various ways by various recipients. The depth of the pragmatic context which is necessary for the full understanding of various sentence-tokens is different, of course, from case to case and cannot even be brought into a linear order (Bar-Hillel: 370).

He continues:

Let me also just mention a brand of dependency which embraces even the non-indexical sentences. I mean the fact that any token has to be understood to belong to a certain language. When somebody hears somebody else utter a sound which sounds to him like the English "nine," he might sometimes have good reason to believe that this sound does not refer to the number nine, and in this case he will have good reason to assume that this sound belongs to the German language, in which case it refers to the same as the English "no." In that sense, no linguistic expression is completely independent of the pragmatic context (Bar-Hillel: 371-72).

An example of an indexical expression is "he's out." The meaning of this expression is quite different if it is uttered at the ball park, at the fights, or when answering the phone. Unlike an indexical expression, a non-indexical expression is not dependent upon a particular speaker. Thus, according to Bar-Hillel, the statement "ice floats on water" is a non-indexical statement for it means the same thing to almost every English-speaking adult. Non-indexical expressions have universal meaning. Of course, certain caveats or qualifications must be noted. For example, this assumes that one knows what ice is, what water is, and what floating is; this further assumes that one realizes that the depth of the water must be sufficient enough to allow the ice to float.⁷

This notion of indexicality and non-indexicality is of utmost importance for any science--natural or social. Because indexical expressions are contextually determined, their use in formal discourse is awkward and may be impossible. Anyone doing science must make distinctions between indexical expressions and objective or non-indexical expressions. The ability of the natural sciences to substitute objective expressions for indexical expressions has in part contributed to the great strides they have made. Garfinkel argues that the ability to substitute objective for indexical expressions distinguishes the exact sciences

from the inexact sciences. The substitution of objective for indexical expressions "for problem formulation, methods, findings, adequate demonstration, adequate evidence and the rest is both an actual task and an actual achievement, whereas in the case of the inexact sciences the availability of the distinction and substitutability to actual tasks, practices, and results remains unrealizably programmatic" (Garfinkel, 1967: 5). Simply, Garfinkel is arguing that it is not possible for the social sciences to remove the indexical qualities inherent in their methods.

A study conducted by Garfinkel of the UCLA Outpatient Clinic shows how indexical expressions affect social science research. Garfinkel and his co-workers were attempting to answer the question "by what criteria are its applicants selected for treatment." Two graduate students were assigned to examine 1,582 clinic folders for information with which to fill out a coding sheet. "To no one's surprise, preliminary work showed that in order to accomplish the coding, coders were assuming knowledge of the very organized ways of the clinic that their coding procedures were intended to produce descriptions of. More interestingly, such presupposed knowledge seemed necessary and was most deliberately consulted whenever, for whatever reasons, the coders needed to be satisfied that they had coded 'what really happened'" (Garfinkel 1, 1967: 20). According to Garfinkel, this occurred no matter how unambiguous the folder contents were. Thus, any claims to non-indexical actuarial methods is, at best, circumspect. The coding procedure and its results, although indexical, are treated by many social scientists as being non-indexical. Thus, it is important to note that all social science research is affected by the indexical quality of its methods. We shall return to this in the next section.

In order to deal with the contents of the file folders, the two graduate students employed what Garfinkel calls "ad hocing" considerations. These "ad

hoking" considerations are essentially features of the coding instructions. Coders used "'ad hoc' considerations in order to recognize the relevance of the coding instructions to the organized activities of the clinic. Only when this relevance was clear were the coders satisfied that the coding instructions analyzed actually encountered folder contents so as to permit the coders to treat folder contents as reports of 'real events'" (Garfinkel, 1967: 21). Garfinkel identifies these "ad hoking" considerations as "et cetera," "let it pass," "unless," and "factum valet" (an action that is otherwise prohibited is counted correct once it is done). These "ad hoking" considerations allow the individual to get a handle on the ambiguities inherent in any situation. Cicourel explicates this interpretive procedure:

The participants to a conversation must "fill in" meanings throughout the exchange and after the exchange when attempting to recall or reconstruct what happened because of the inadequacies of oral and non-oral communication, and the routine practice of leaving many intentions unstated. Vague or ambiguous or truncated expressions are located by members, given meaning contextually and across contexts, by their retrospective-prospective sense of occurrence. Present utterances or descriptive accounts that contain ambiguous or promissory overtones can be examined prospectively by the speaker-hearer for their possible meaning in some future sense under the assumption of filling in meaning now and imagining the kinds of intentions that can be expected later. Or, past remarks can be seen as clarifying present utterances (Cicourel, 1973a: 87).

Garfinkel calls this interpretive procedure the "et cetera" principle. The "et cetera" principle has two interrelated parts. First, while engaging in a conversation, individuals allow unclear information to pass while waiting for clarifying information. Individuals fill in vague and incomplete conversations by a retrospective-prospective procedure. Second, individuals seek information about the context of the conversation in order to clarify indexical expressions.

For the ethnomethodologist, the "et cetera" principle is always embedded in the notion of rules. Inextricably intertwined, actors, rules, and situations constitute the reality of the situation, that is, everyday life. Rules are

not external to the situation in which they are applied.⁸ Furthermore, situations never exist independent of the actors. Also, situations are constantly changing because the knowledge of the actors is always changing; the application of a rule always alters the situation. In light of this perspective, properties of rules can never be completely and objectively identified; they must always be studied in concrete social situations. Rules are unavoidable and necessarily incomplete (no matter how formally the rules are stated). For example, even the highly formal instructions of the coding sheet in the UCLA Outpatient Clinic study had to be filled out by the "et cetera" principle. Mehan and Wood write:

Ethnomethodological studies of rule interpretation have been conducted in many settings, including legal, medical, educational, bureaucratic, and social scientific settings. In each of these settings, the three analytic elements--actors, rules, and situations--are prominent. For example, in the legal setting, the actor producing the behavior is the suspect. The observer determining the appropriateness of the actor's behavior is the policeman or judge. The rules are the legal code. In the medical situation, the actor producing the behavior is the patient, the observer is the doctor or psychiatrist, the rules are disease terms. In bureaucratic situations, the actor producing the behavior is the client or customer, the observer is the administrator, the rules are the administrative procedures (Mehan and Wood: 76).

The legal code, the disease terms, and the administrative procedures only become rules when applied in concrete situations. It is through the use of rules that an individual shows others that his actions are rational. Furthermore, individuals' "competent use" of rules is contingent upon their firm grasp of the practical actions in a particular concrete situation. For example, Emerson reports that during a gynecological examination all of the participants' behavior is guided by routine technical procedures. Thus, the doctor's verbal exchanges with the patient are limited to routine phrases of reassurance and direction. "There is little margin for ad-libbing during the gynecological examination. The specifications for demeanor are elaborate. Foremost is that

both staff and patients should be nonchalant about what is happening" (Emerson: 83).

Hopefully, the foregoing discussion has shown the indexical quality of rules. It is precisely this ability to apply rules in concrete situations concomitant with the "et cetera" principle that permits individuals to see these situations as ordered. Basic to this is that human beings must cooperate in order to exist. Human cooperation is essentially symbolic. And the symbolic nature of human cooperation requires shared meaning. This shared meaning or knowledge by members in social groups is so fundamental for their functioning that it becomes assumed or taken for granted by every "competent" member. "Indeed, the forms of knowledge most taken for granted in any group come to be seen as absolute-- as independent of the knowing minds, as out there" (Douglas, 1970c: 27). This then becomes part of the individuals' background expectancies. Garfinkel elaborates this point by drawing upon Schutz's view of everyday life:

One of the background expectancies Schutz described concerns the sanctioned use of doubt as a constituent feature of a world that is being understood in common. Schutz proposed that for the conduct of his everyday affairs the person assumes, assumes the other person assumes as well, and assumes that as he assumes it of the other person, the other person assumes it of him, that a relationship of undoubted correspondence is the sanctioned relationship between the actual appearances of an object and the intended object that appears in a particular way. For the person conducting his everyday affairs, objects, for him as he expects for others, are as they appear to be. To treat this relationship under a rule of doubt requires that the necessity and motivation for such a rule be justified (Garfinkel, 1967: 50).

A disruption of the normal state of affairs in a situation requires a modification or suspension of the rules in order to bring the situation back to its normal state of affairs. The suspension or modification of the rules requires that the person who modifies or suspends the rules must justify his actions.

Ethnomethodological studies "indicate that the actual practices of using rules do not permit an analyst to account for regular patterns of behavior by invoking the

notion that these patterns occur because members of a society or some organization are following rules. Instead, these studies show that the ways that members employ rules requires that they continually develop what a rule means when they come to treat actual cases and when they find that they must defend the rationality of their choices....The work of making and accepting such descriptions of conduct makes social settings appear as orderly for the participants, and it is this sense and appearance of order that rules in use, in fact, provide and that ethnomethodologists, in fact, study" (Zimmerman and Wieder: 292).

Zimmerman, in a study of bureaucratic actors' procedures in a public assistance organization, deals with the ways a receptionist and interviewer handle potential clients. Zimmerman details numerous examples of how the actors employ rules in concrete situations. In one case a receptionist assigned a client to an interviewer who had not yet completed her first interview. This was perceived by the receptionist to be a violation of the normal rules for processing clients. To complicate matters the client would miss her doctor's appointment unless she was assigned to another interviewer. The senior receptionist then decided to switch the client to another interviewer. The decision to switch the client to another interviewer resulted in a discussion among the receptionists as to whom the client would be interviewed by and how the books would be altered to account for the change. This was a suspension of the rules. The imposition of the rules allows the receptionist to recognize a disruption of the normal processing procedure, and thereby justifies the suspension of the rules in order to bring the orderly processing procedure back to its normal state of affairs. "By suspending the rule in light of the exceptional character of the situation, the intent of the rule might be said to be honored--its intent being formulable on a particular occasion by situationally relevant reference to the 'usual'

course of affairs its routine or precedented use typically reproduces. Through the situated judgmental modification of the routine application of the rule, the 'same' business as usual course of affairs may be--for all intents and purposes--reliably reproduced" (Zimmerman, 1970b: 232).

One way in which such studies are carried out is by what Garfinkel calls the documentary method. The documentary method treats appearances of everyday life as "the document of," as "pointing to," as "standing on behalf of," underlying patterns of meaning. But, unlike literal observation, what is known about underlying patterns of meaning interprets the document and the latter, in turn, interprets the underlying patterns of meaning.⁹ This dialectical interplay is premised upon the indexical quality of everyday life and the continually changing situations of everyday life. Further methodological implications of ethnomethodology are discussed in the next section.

Theory and Practice: The Ad Hoc Nature of Methodology

Returning to a point made earlier in the paper, it should be emphasized that the phenomena must determine the method and not the other way around. Douglas notes that a persistent problem with the absolutist sociological perspective is that the methods employed by absolutist sociologists are incompatible with their theories. The highly structured methods which these sociologists apply are tantamount to imposing one reality upon another thus distorting the reality studied (Mehan, 1973). Krain argues that the "ad hocing" principle identified by Garfinkel affects all instruments (methods) one applies to a problem. Thus, any similarities in results between two different and unique situations may be a function not of the similarities of the situations but of the instruments (methods) employed. Taken to its logical conclusion, the "ad hocing" principle has extremely important implications for science

(Krain: 200-201). What then becomes of paramount importance in methodology is not the notion of a right or wrong method but of which method is more "faithful to the phenomena."¹⁰

The proposition of the method being "faithful to the phenomena" is quite clear when the methodologies of the two major variations of symbolic interactionism are examined. Meltzer and Petras identify the two major variations, the Chicago and Iowa schools of symbolic interactionism. The foremost proponent of the Chicago school has been Herbert Blumer while the foremost proponent of the Iowa school has been Manford H. Kuhn. The most important feature distinguishing these schools from one another is methodology. Blumer argues for a more phenomenological methodology which would enable the researcher "to get closer" to those he is studying so that he can sympathetically take the position of these actors. Kuhn, on the other hand, argues for the use of objective, overt-behavioral indices. He contends that it is possible to operationalize the key concepts of symbolic interactionism, thus meeting the standard requirements of traditional scientific inquiry. Kuhn's ultimate goal was the development of highly structured measuring instruments which would be independent of any specific situation.

A central aspect of the methodological differences between the two turns on the notion of the self. Blumer remains true to Mead's definition of the self as composed of an "I" and a "Me." For Blumer, the "I" is the spontaneous and indeterminate nature of the individual and in the "I's" interplay with the "Me"--the generalized other--accounts for innovation and change in society. Kuhn, on the other hand, does not ascribe these attributes to the self. Rather, he sees the self as a set of attitudes structured by one's primary groups. Kuhn argues that if we know the individual's primary groups, then we can discover his self-attitudes and thereby predict his behavior. Thus, "the Chicagoans have

tended to conceive of both self and society in processual terms, while the Iowans have stressed structural conceptions of both phenomena" (Meltzer and Petras: 51).

The methodology Kuhn employed to study interaction is highly problematic when submitted to the acid test of being "true to the phenomena" being studied. Although Kuhn, like all symbolic interactionists, sees the essential reality as that of everyday life, his method does not permit him to remain "faithful to the phenomena" of everyday life. What Kuhn's method does is impose an artificial reality upon everyday life, *i.e.*, the ad hoc feature inherent in his method causes the ambiguities in the phenomena studied to conform to the method (Garfinkel, 1967). Thus, Kuhn is open to basically the same criticisms that are directed at absolutist sociologists. This strong behavioral strain in symbolic interactionism, evident not only in Kuhn's work but in some of the work of Schatzman, Strauss, Lofland, and Becker, precludes the possibility of synthesizing symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology as Denzin has suggested. As Douglas notes, the problem here is that many researchers are unaware that the concepts and hypotheses they impose on everyday life create a new reality (because of the ad hoc nature of the method). Thus, the irony is that these researchers are guilty of the same errors they criticize absolutist sociologists of making.

Douglas goes on to suggest that two distinct methodological lines of interactionist thought can be identified: behavioral interactionism and phenomenological interactionism. The behavioral interactionist imposes ordering concepts and hypothetical forms of reasoning on everyday life. Phenomenological interactionism, on the other hand, makes a commitment to studying phenomena on their own grounds. Clearly, Kuhn *et al.* represent the behavioral interactionist position. Within the phenomenological interactionist mode, Douglas places the symbolic interactionism of Blumer and ethnomethodology. Blumer's phenomenological bent is a

much truer reflection of Mead's thought than the behavioral interactionist school. Natanson suggests that the key to understanding Mead's work is whether one labels Mead as a "social behaviorist" or not. The term "social behaviorist" has been applied to Mead by his editors. Natanson writes:

My line of argument is that Mead is somewhat the captive of his interpreters and that this captivity is especially unfortunate, since a close reading of Mead's work reveals a wealth of insight that by far transcends even the broadest conception of behaviorism. The critique I will offer is intended to be an immanent criticism; it consists essentially in showing that there are fundamentally irreconcilable tendencies in Mead's position which create internal strains and ambiguities. Perhaps the major focus of these internal contradictions is the life long difficulty Mead had in reconciling his early but deep-rooted behaviorism with the range of ideas he developed later which simply could not be handled within a behavioristic framework (Natanson: 3).

Natanson goes on to suggest that all Mead's work bears striking resemblance to the phenomenological positions developed by Edmund Husserl.

The phenomenological interactionist perspective is not free of the ad hoc principle, which is inherent within all methods, and thus within this perspective important methodological distinctions must be made. Although all phenomenological interactionists maintain the integrity of the phenomena of everyday life, what the researcher sees as relevant in everyday life will determine his methods. Thus, there will be disagreement over what is the central phenomena of everyday life and hence the methods to be employed in studying that phenomena.¹¹

Under the general rubric of ethnomethodology, various researchers take different approaches dependent upon what they conceive to be important in everyday life. Douglas identifies two types of ethnomethodologists, the linguistic ethnomethodologist and the situational ethnomethodologist. The linguistic ethnomethodologist concentrates upon the actual conversations of the actors he is studying. They tend to follow the Wittgensteinian notion that "language is its use," and hence they examine the observable actions of actors in attempting

to ascertain their meanings. A criticism of this approach is that the linguistic ethnomethodologist cannot bridge the gap between the observed uses of language as representative of meaning without taking into consideration the common sense understandings of everyday life.¹² Prominent among these linguistic ethnomethodologists are Harvey Sacks and David Sudnow.

Many of the linguistic ethnomethodologists have come to the realization that implicit within their methods is an understanding of the situational uses of language. Wieder and Cicourel, for example, study language from the situational ethnomethodological perspective. The situational ethnomethodologist is "concerned with getting at the members' meanings and seeing how they are related to the members' (situational) actions. While these sociologists certainly are concerned with the analysis of the everyday uses of language and see this as a fundamentally independent aspect of everyday life, they emphasize a more general and, hopefully, in the long run a more creative understanding of everyday life" (Douglas: 33). Within this perspective there are a wide range of views on how to study everyday life. "At one extreme are the ethnomethodologists who use the idea of 'members presenting features' much as their linguistically oriented colleagues use 'social uses' to hang their analyses of situational meanings onto externally perceivable events: (Douglas: 34). Douglas notes that Garfinkel's recent work is in this perspective. At the other extreme, which is represented by the work of Schutz and Berger and Luckmann, are those phenomenologists, highly philosophical in orientation, who make very little use of direct observation in their work.

It is not possible, then, to state which method and thus which perspective of everyday life is best. All that can be done is to submit the methodology to the test of being true to everyday life. What becomes problematic, then, is how do researchers maintain the integrity of the phenomena when researching and

reporting the phenomena. That is, by researching and reporting the phenomena the danger is that the researcher may be creating a new phenomena because of the ad hoc nature of the method. It is precisely this question which lies at the heart of a growing debate in ethnomethodology. For example, Schwartz argues that the documentary method used by Garfinkel necessarily distorts the phenomena, that by reporting the phenomena Garfinkel destroys the phenomena. Schwartz argues that instead of reporting the phenomena, the researcher should display the phenomena by acting it out along the lines of a theatrical play. He argues that if a researcher wants to understand a paranoid, for example, the researcher must become a paranoid. It is by acting out the phenomena that the researcher displays certain things to the audience thus evoking certain reactions from them (Mehan and Wood, 152-158). Taken to its logical conclusion, Schwartz is suggesting that research cannot be reported, that the best a researcher can do is attempt to impart to the audience what the phenomena feels like.

It is not difficult to see why the phenomenological researchers have been attacked for not "doing science." Although this attack is in part the result of equating science with the positivistic strain of the social sciences, the notion of objectivity or rather the usefulness and shareability of knowledge is at issue. If the results of phenomenological research are only relevant to the specific phenomena studied and cannot be generalized then this approach is of little or no value. As Douglas argues, the phenomenological researcher must strive towards making his results objective, objective not in the absolutist sociological sense of being free of any situation, but rather in the sense of being shared knowledge, i.e., objective knowledge. Douglas argues that the phenomenological researcher, in order to make his knowledge objective and thus useful, must be able to free his research from the situations of everyday life in which the observations are made. Douglas argues that this can be done by:

(1) establishing systematically the properties of research methods especially as they refer to the situations in which the observations are made; (2) that the properties of a research procedure be reproduced, though they never can be completely reproduced, to see if they produce similar results; (3) research must be directed at field methods in order to determine how reliable and valid the methods are; and (4) that we must be acutely aware of the effect the researcher has on both his research and his reporting of that research.

The phenomenological researcher, in order to make his results objective, must be aware of the ad hoc nature of all research as was discussed earlier. That is, unless the researcher examines the ad hoc nature of his research, he is in danger of making the same error the absolutist sociologists are accused of making. Thus, as part of any research, the ad hoc nature of the methods must be carefully examined. It is only after the ad hoc principles inherent in the method are, at least partially, identified can the researcher's results be made at all objective, i.e., be made trans-situational. It is towards this goal that the phenomenological researchers should be striving. The central argument, it seems to us, is that if a researcher is content only with distinguishing between quantitative and qualitative research then the value of the research is severely limited. The researcher who opts for the phenomenological approach must further explore the methods he employs in order to identify their ad hoc nature. Unfortunately, many researchers do not take their research to this all important step. Until this is done, systematic studies of everyday life can never be fully achieved.

Footnotes

¹To measure and reduce social phenomena numerically in an attempt to be "objective," and, on the other hand, to take the position that social phenomena do not lend themselves to quantification is an important distinction. However, we are arguing that should the researcher opt for the qualitative method that, even then, he must carefully examine how the methods he employs affect his results. We will return to this point in the last section.

²It is possible to classify the social sciences in many ways depending upon one's purposes. We have opted for the distinction between positivism and phenomenology because in the final analysis this distinction rests on the notions of objectivity and subjectivity, especially as they are manifested in methodological considerations.

³We are not making a distinction between the models of the physical and biological sciences. Like the social sciences, the biological sciences have often taken their models from the physical sciences.

⁴By this we mean that man is born into a meaningful world. That he comes to learn the meanings of objects through social interaction. Although meanings are not intrinsic to objects, this does not mean that the individual has to negotiate the meanings of every object he encounters. Many meanings are learned, that is, they exist prior to a specific individual. But at the same time, the meanings of objects are modified and transformed in social interaction.

⁵Studies which have examined the interactions among newsroom personnel have shown that what is considered news and how news is handled is influenced to a large extent by the interactions of newsroom personnel. See, Warren Breed, "Social Control in the News Room" in Wilbur Schramm (ed.), Mass Communication (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1960), pp. 178-194; Rodney W. Stark, "Policy and the Pros: An Organizational Analysis of a Metropolitan Newspaper," Berkeley Journal of Sociology, 7: 11-31; Robert Darnton, "Writing News and Telling Stories," Daedalus, 104: 175-193; and Leon V. Sigal, Reporters and Officials (Lexington, Ma.: D.C. Heath, 1973).

⁶Bar-Hillel identifies another context which influences the meaning of an expression, the linguistic. By this he means that the grammar of any natural language consists of syntactic, semantic, and phonological rules which determine the ordering of linguistic elements within a sentence, paragraph, and text.

⁷It is well beyond the scope of this paper to discuss in any depth indexical and non-indexical expressions. It is important to raise one qualification, it may be questionable whether the sentence "ice floats on water" is indeed a non-indexical expression. What seems to be the key in determining if an expression is non-indexical seems to be whether or not it is accepted by rational people as being a universal truth (Mehan and Wood: 94-95).

⁸The idea that rules are not external to the situation in which they are applied becomes a key difference between symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology. Symbolic interactionism seems to argue that rules of interaction are external to the situation.

⁹Major criticisms have been directed at the documentary method because of Garfinkel's vague explication of it. The method itself argues that the researcher cannot understand what he observes in a situation unless he comes to some understanding of how the individuals in the situation perceive it.

¹⁰The term "faithful to the phenomena" is a rather difficult one to explain and to apply. What we mean by the term is that an examination of methodology must be predicated upon an examination of how that method distorts the phenomena. Certain methods, such as the positivistic methods, distort the phenomena more than other methods.

¹¹Since methods cannot be divorced from ad hoc considerations, how the researcher sees everyday life will affect both his method and its inherent ad hoc feature.

¹²To elucidate further, these researchers cannot hang their analyses on the overt behavior of interactions without implicitly coming to some understanding of the situation. The criticism is that these researchers are not aware of the impossibility of solely hanging their analyses on overt behavior.

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